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Training the force

By Staff Sgt. David Strobel



Sgt. 1st Class Timothy Webb, OCT for 4th Brigade's 3/337th TSB keeps a keen eye out as a Tennessee National Guardsman covers his sector. In moments, OPFOR from the 3/337th will assault this position. (photo by Staff Sgt. David Strobel, 4th Bde. 85th Div.)

National Guard soldiers crouch behind trees and dirt, scanning across a field of weeds, watching the far wood line. "I've got movement!" shouts one man to his platoon sergeant. Five people walk out of the woods, straight towards the dug-in troops. "They've got weapons!" the soldier relays. A moment later, the five breaks into a run, raise their M-16s and unload on the defending soldiers. "Return fire!" shouts the platoon sergeant, but his troops are already picking their targets and squeezing off rounds.

Staff Sgt. Terry Philips of the 4th Brigade's 3/337th TSB stands just behind a pair of defenders in their Fort Campbell foxhole, watches and smiles. "This is it before they go to the big sandbox," he says as an aggressor's MILES sounds, signaling a kill by the defenders. Working as an Observer/Controller/Trainer, Philips makes sure the Tennessee unit is ready for war. His usual job is with the aggressing team, the OPFOR. "I'd rather be running through the woods," he says, watching his team members give the defenders a hard time. But right now, the Guards members need him as an OCT. And that's ok with him.

These troops are trained as engineers, water purification experts and drivers, and they've demonstrated their skill during annual training. But now they're prepping for deployment, heading to a place where they will probably need to dig in and defend an area. Somebody has to bring them up to speed, make sure they're ready for their new assignments. That's why soldiers from the 4th Brigade have traveled from Fort Knox to Fort Campbell.

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Commander's Corner

*Soldiers, Civilians and Family Members of
First United States Army*

***"We cannot know the duration of this war.
Yet we know its outcome: we will prevail. The Iraqi
regime will be disarmed. The Iraqi regime will be
ended.***

***The Iraqi people will be free. And our world
will be more secure and peaceful."***

**President George W. Bush
The Pentagon, March 25, 2003**

Our soldiers are making tremendous sacrifices in the global war on terrorism, whether in Iraq, Kuwait, Afghanistan or here in the United States. Unquestionably, First Army's impact on each mobilized and deployed Guardsman and Reservist is critical to their successful mission performance and safe return home.

We must be mindful of the stress these soldiers are feeling as they await deployment. More importantly, we must make use of every available moment to train and ensure the combat readiness of these troops. Each person in the headquarters, the divisions and training support brigades carries a burden of responsibility for every Reserve Component soldier being trained, mobilized and deployed. We will not allow soldiers to go into harm's way unprepared.

Despite the tremendous OPTEMPO throughout our command, our core missions remain at the heart of all we do. Each day we are adjusting annual training schedules to meet the demands of today's reality. All of you are doing a superb job as you meet these seemingly impossible tasks. Thank you for your dedication and professionalism in these trying times.

At all times, think OPSEC, Force Protection and Safety. We set the example for every soldier we touch. Once again, thank you for all you do for First U.S. Army and the nation.

Lt. Gen. Joseph R. Inge
First in Deed



First In Deed

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General Officer announcements

Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld announced that the president has nominated Army Brig. Gen. Keith M. Huber for appointment to the rank of major general. Huber is currently serving as deputy commanding general, First United States Army, Fort Gillem, Ga.

Army Reserve Brig. Gen. Michael G. Corrigan has been nominated for appointment to the rank of major general. Corrigan is currently serving as the commander, 1st Brigade and assistant division commander, 78th Division (Training Support), Edison, N.J.

Soldiers in the community



Photo by Karen Bradshaw

Capt. William E. Brown spoke to G.P. Babb Middle School honors students about patriotism on April 3, 2003. Brown is Chief, Military Justice, First U.S. Army's Staff Judge Advocate's office. Babb Middle School is located in Forest Park, Ga.

Command Sergeant Major's Message



**Command Sgt. Maj.
Jeffrey J. Mellinger**

As I write this piece, our nation's warriors are heavily engaged in combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. With continual news of those operations, it is easy to lose focus on other critically important missions in support of our global war on terrorism. And it is, indeed, a global war. From guarding bases and critical sites in CONUS, searching jungles for terrorists, combat operations in support of Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom, and ongoing missions in Kosovo and Bosnia, our soldiers are on point for the Nation. We still have mobilizations ongoing at every one of our platforms in support of combat operations in Afghanistan, shipboard operations, base security, KFOR, SFOR, and more. We also have annual training requirements, lanes, and individual training. So now is not the time to lose focus.

It would be easy to get the feeling that with most of the mobilized soldiers gone, we can take a step back and enjoy a breather. We've helped get soldiers to every place in the world that they are needed. We've filled PLL, fixed broken and bent equipment, trained soldiers in war fighting skills, given shots, and worked magic to get them out the door. But we're far from done, and must remain vigilant, focused, and keep a sense of urgency about all we do.

Recently, I had a young man and his mother in my office to talk about the Army. He had wanted to join the Army to be a Ranger, and a family friend had told him to speak with me on the matter. As I spoke to the young man about Army life, basic and advanced training, airborne school, and his first days in the Rangers, I could see his mother held a different interest. She wanted reassurance that her son was going to be well-cared for, that he would learn his craft before having to use it, and that he would be surrounded by competent soldiers and led by knowing and caring leaders. Rather like when my own son joined the Marine Corps. I just wanted to know that he would receive the very best training from the very best leaders. And so, with the help of the Accessions Command's Command Sgt. Maj. and a covey of recruiters, this young man's goals are being matched with a date to join. I suspect that I'll track this young American's progress as he moves down the path of becoming a soldier. You would all be proud of his demeanor, perspective, ideals, and goals. And we have an Army full of patriots just like him, and all they ask is to be led by us.

And just yesterday, as if a personal reminder of the trust placed in us as leaders, my daughter called asking for details about a soldier killed recently in Iraq. I was impressed with her concern, but then she told me she had gone to school with the young soldier. While the soldier and his unit was not touched by First Army, my first thoughts after consoling my daughter were whether the soldier and his comrades had the best training possible before they deployed. Knowing the unit, I am sure they were well-trained, but I also have to wonder if we are giving all we can to those in our charge? Do we give the training as if it were our sons and daughters? Or do we look at it as yet another group passing through our doors? Will we get a sickening feeling in our stomachs when we realize the soldier on the news was trained and equipped by us? Or will we feel badly for the soldier and family, but be assured that they had the very best training we could provide? And as we approve time off, are we confident that there is no more training the unit needs to better prepare it for what lies ahead? These, and so many more, are things every good leader must consider.

So I ask that each of us redouble our efforts and energy, and lean further forward as we continue the mission of training, mobilizing, validating and deploying our Nation's most precious resource. Focus on training, safely, to standard. Get after equipment as though you were on the manifest. Look to how you can help someone else as they go about their business. We're not done yet, so don't slouch in the saddle. We've a few more miles to go. Thanks for all you do every day.



A 400 meter sprint to be America's best

Maj. Margaret Bozgoz, (USARC DCS G4)



"If it's one thing I would like people to know about me is that I consider myself a much better sprinter than a distance man"- Captain Wes

Could you pass the Army Physical Fitness Test if the distance was a 400-meter Sprint? Could you pass it if the minimum standard was no slower than 48 seconds?

First Army's own Capt. Wesley (Wes) Whitaker at age 42 would be the best in the nation.

Matter of fact, Whitaker is one of the fastest

male 400-meter runners in the United States and his times place him in the company of the top world-class competitors. In 2002, he was named ALL American at the distance and ranked number 7 in the United States in his age group. A few of his recent achievements include:

- Nominated for the Cheyney University Hall of Fame 2003
- Cheyney University Record Holder in the 400, 500, 600, meter dashes. Records which are still Standing.
- 2001 US Track and Field National Masters Champion and All-American on the 4x400 Meter Relay. Boston Mass, March 2001
- Ranked #7 Nationally in May 2002 in the 400-Meter Dash 40-44 Age Category
- All-American in the 400 Meter Dash 40-44 Age Category 2002
- Penn-Relay Participant at least 12 times
- Georgia State Games Champion 40-44 Age Category at the 5K Distance, July 2002

Whitaker trains by himself running 50 + miles per week.

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In addition to his full time Active Duty position in the G3 section at First Army, he is married to his wife Cathy of 23 Years, has a son Aaron who is 22 and attending Evergreen University in Olympia, Washington, and a Daughter Tisha who is 15 and attending Morrow High School in Forest Park. Whitaker also coaches running and is a team member of the Atlanta Track Club men's Competitive Team.

"While growing up in Philadelphia in High School I use to race the Number 10 Trolley from 63rd to 41st Street (4 Miles) for practice twice a week" states Wes, Listed below, are his best times that indicate his range for both sprints and distance. "This year I have won the Masters Category in my last 3 races states Whitaker. I think if it's one thing I would like people to know about me is that I consider myself a much better sprinter than a distance man. Most people think I just run distance." Whitaker's goal this year is to make All-American in 5 Different Distances (200, 400, 800, 1500, and the Mile). His best times in running events include:

100-meter -10:6	2 Mile Run-10:05
200-meters 21.4	5k-16:11
400 metes- 47.2	10k-35:15
800 meters-1:54.9	10 Mile-57:25

Watch for Captian Wes Whitaker in upcoming 2003 events:

- 19-20 April USATF Georgia Masters Championships (200,400 Meters) Savannah, Ga.
- 24-26 April Penn Relays (4x400 Meter Relay, Leadoff Leg) Philadelphia, Pa.
- 3 May Southeastern US Masters Track and Field Meet (200, 400) Raleigh, N.C.
- Jun (TBA) USATF Georgia Championships (800 Meters), TBA Ga.
- Jun (TBA) Furman Track Classic (400 meters) Greenville, S.C.
- Jun (TBA) Birmingham TC Open and Masters Track Classic (800 and 1500 meters)
- Jul (TBA) Georgia State Games (5k road race and 1500 meters on the Track) Saturday and Sunday
- 7-10 Aug USATF National Masters Outdoor Championships, Eugene, Ore. (400 Meters)
- Aug (TBA) USATF Southeastern Regional Masters Championships, Alexandria, Va. (800 meters and the 1 Mile Run)

New museum highlights the Guard

by Master Sgt. Bob Haskell

How many U.S. presidents have served in the militia or National Guard? Who is Norma Parsons Erb? What is the Dick Act?

The answers to those questions about the National Guard and a wealth of other information about this country's oldest military organization can be found in a new museum that will officially be opened to the public on March 17.

The National Guard Memorial Museum is located at One Massachusetts Ave., N.W., one block west of Union Station in Washington, D.C. The museum occupies 5,600 square feet of the lower level of the home of the National Guard Association of the United States. It is the first national museum dedicated to the National Guard and will be open weekdays from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

"Less is more" is how the facility impressed one recent visitor, who has explored many of the museums, including those of the Smithsonian Institution in the nation's capital.

"It is extremely well done," she said. The museum's displays and artifacts, she said, inform and enlighten visitors about the history and mission of the colonial militia and the modern Army and Air National Guard without confusing them with too much stuff.

Many states, including Illinois, Maine and Texas, have wonderful museums dedicated to their National Guard heritage. The Memorial Museum explains the big picture.

In about an hour, visitors to the new museum in Washington, who know little or nothing about the National Guard, can discover how it has evolved as a national military force. They can gain a lot of in-depth insight if they stay longer.

They can learn that 19 U.S. presidents, including George Washington and George W. Bush, have served in the militia or Guard. That Norma Parsons Erb from Maine was the first woman officer inducted in the National Guard. That the Dick Act, passed by Congress in 1903 and also called the Militia Act, was named for Ohio Congressman Charles Dick and gave the president the power to call up the Guard for longer than nine months for national emergencies, including war.

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The museum has seven core exhibit areas that reflect this country's history of the citizen-soldier in the homeland defense and in conflicts and peacekeeping missions around the world. They are the Introductory Area, the Theatre, the Militia Area, the National Guard Comes of Age, World War II, the Cold War, the Modern Era, and Today and Tomorrow.

From Concord Bridge to [providing security] at Ronald Reagan National Airport, the Guard is rooted in homeland security while also serving abroad," said Kristin Patterson Jones, the National Guard Association's deputy director of communications.

Every state and U.S. territory is represented in the museum, and many of the artifacts on display - ranging from a Jew's-harp to jungle fatigues -- are on loan from the states.

The Guard museum, however, is just the start of an ambitious program that the National Guard Educational Foundation hopes will inform people even more thoroughly about the National Guard, which now numbers 458,000 people and which constitutes 34 percent of the total Army and 25 percent of the Air Force.

"We're very proud of the fact that it is done and that people can come and see it," said Patterson Jones of the museum that opened on Dec. 13, 2002 to members of the National Guard in celebration of the National Guard's 366th birthday. The museum opened to the public March 17, 2003.

The non-profit educational foundation hopes to raise \$3.6 million to fund educational programs and special events at the museum as well as to support the day-to-day operations.

Important Web Link

Please be aware/disseminate widely through personnel channels the link below which is great Q/A regarding Operation Iraqi Freedom. Pay particular attention to question five regarding mail operations.

<http://www.army.mil/operations/iraq/faq.html>

News Release from the United States Department of Defense Troop support mail policy stressed

To bolster force protection, the general public is urged not to send unsolicited mail, care packages or donations to service members forward deployed unless you are a family member, loved one or personal friend. On Oct. 30, 2002, the Department of Defense (DoD) suspended the "Operation Dear Abby" and "Any Servicemember" mail programs due to force protection concerns. Although these programs provide an excellent means of support to friends and loved ones stationed overseas, they also provide an avenue to introduce hazardous substances or materials into the mail system from unknown sources. Unsolicited mail, packages and donations from organizations and individuals also compete for limited airlift space used to transport supplies, war-fighting materiel and mail from family and loved ones.

Recently, DoD has become aware of organizations and individuals who continue to support some form of the "Any Servicemember" program by using the names and addresses of individual servicemembers and unit addresses. These programs are usually supported by well-intentioned, thoughtful and patriotic groups who are simply unaware of the new risks facing deployed military forces. Some individuals and groups publicize the names and addresses of service members, ships or units on Web sites, with good intentions. The result, however, is a potential danger to the troops they wish to support. DoD cannot support creative and well-intentioned efforts that defeat force protection measures, but can instead recommend alternatives to mail and donation programs. To show support to troops overseas, the following are recommended:

Log on to the following Web sites to show support, to include greeting cards, virtual Thank You cards and calling card donations to help troops stay in contact with loved ones:

http://www.defendamerica.mil/support_troops.html

<http://www.usocares.org/home.htm>

<http://www.army.mil/operations/iraq/faq.html>

Visit Department of Veterans Affairs hospitals and nursing homes. Volunteer your services to honor veterans who served in past conflicts. Mail from family members and loved ones has always been encouraged and the military mail system will continue to work hard to get that mail to servicemembers overseas.

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TRICARE Prime Eligibility for Family Members of Reserve Component Members Health Affairs Policy 96-018 has been revised and gives Reserve family members eligibility to enroll in TRICARE Prime when the military sponsor has active duty orders for more than 30 days. Previously, the policy offered eligibility only if orders were for more than 179 days. There are no enrollment fees or co-payments for family members who elect to enroll in Prime. Tricare Prime has lower costs for a family. There is no enrollment fee and no co-payments as long as the plan's rules are followed and a patient stays within the approved network of military and civilian doctors. Enrollment is required. Enrollment forms must be completed and Military Treatment Facility (MTF) or civilian network providers must be used.

Anti-Terrorism / Force Protection

FAMILY PROTECTIVE MEASURES



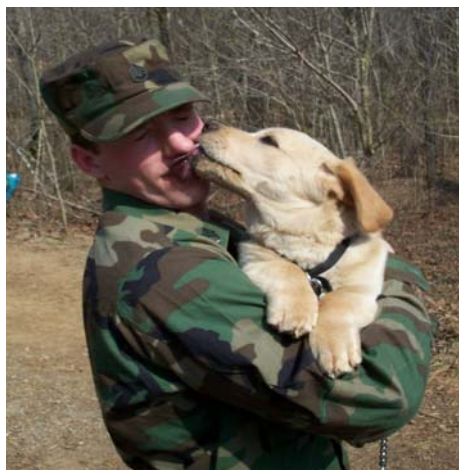
- Know your neighborhood;
 - get to know your neighbors
- Be alert to strangers or vendors in your neighborhood

BE PREPARED FOR UNEXPECTED EVENTS

- Set up simple signal systems that can alert family members or associates that there is a danger
- Carry identification showing your blood type and any special medical conditions.

Puppy Power on the Lanes

Story and photos by Staff Sgt. David Strobel, 4th Bde, 85th Div.



Staff Sgt. Paul Grise, 3/337th OPFOR aggressor and dog rescuer. Little Doc shows his gratitude.

When 3/337th Training Support Battalion's OPFOR team lost one of their soldiers to a heart attack earlier this month, it hit them hard. But comfort came in an unexpected form... waddling down a dusty road.

Sgt. 1st Class Michael Longest, an OPFOR aggressor

at Fort Knox, passed away March 2nd. Most of his team was deployed to Fort Campbell, Ky. helping to train activated National Guard and Reserve units. "Longest served as a Navy corpsman in Vietnam, then as a medic during Desert Storm. That's why we called him Doc," said Staff Sgt. Paul Grise.

The day the OPFOR team heard about the death of "Doc" Longest, they were continuing with their training mission. "We were getting back from lunch," said Grise, "driving back in the van, heading to the ranges. And in front of us, running down the road was this dog. He wouldn't get out of our way, so we decided to keep him." And since the OPFOR team rescued the dog shortly after learning about the loss of Longest, they decided to honor Doc's memory by naming the dog after him.



"We call him Little Doc," said Grise. "He's now our mascot. Our first day off, I took him with me to Bowling Green to get his shots and tag."

The vet thinks Little Doc is part Chow and maybe part Dachshund, with his stubby legs. But he's still able to make his way through the woods, which comes in handy when OPFOR puts him to work. Little Doc helps by working COB missions, helping train soldiers learn to handle civilians on the battlefield.

"He's been a tremendous boost to morale," said OPFOR aggressor Spc. Carmen Macho. "Little Doc really breaks up the monotony. He's the most popular soldier we've got down here."

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Sgt. 1st Class Tracy Pope, OPFOR, 3/337th, takes a break with Little Doc, soaking up some rare Fort Campbell sun.



Spc. Teric Clark takes Doc on a "Civilian on the Battlefield" (COB) mission, as a Tennessee National Guardsman deals with a COB. Doc has helped improve the realism of the training 4th Brigade can accomplish at Fort Campbell.



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Army Announces Stryker initial Operational test and evaluation

The Army will conduct an Initial Operational Test and Evaluation (IOT&E) of the Stryker vehicle at Fort Knox, KY, starting in May 2003, as part of fielding the Stryker system. The IOT&E is required by law to determine whether the Stryker system is suitable and effective for use in combat and meets specific requirements as defined in the Stryker Operational Requirement Document.

The IOT&E will yield data on a Stryker-equipped battalion's performance in a combat scenario as measured against a baseline infantry battalion in back-to-back test periods. The five-month IOT&E, originally scheduled to begin in March has been shifted to May to ensure environmental factors such as weather and foliage are consistent between the two test periods. The shift will not delay the milestone review by the Defense Acquisition Executive (DAE) scheduled for December 2003.

Training (Con't)

None of these lessons are new, but for many troops it's a refresher on skills not practiced for years. "When it comes to your basic combat skills, a lot of



An Observer/Controller/Trainer (OCT) watches over Tennessee troops as they work their way through a base protection lane at Fort Campbell. Trainers and support crew are helping prepare activated National Guard and Army Reserve soldiers for deployment.

them haven't done this since basic training," says Sgt. 1st Class Mike Borders, OCT and chief enlisted of the 3/337th TSB OPFOR team. "We want to see them get word running up the chain of command, make sure they're putting round on target." Borders nods with satisfaction at the troops pinning down and taking out OPFOR. "They're doing fine."

April 2003: Month of the Military Child



Since 1986 the Secretary of Defense has designated April as "The Month of the Military Child." The month is designed



to recognize the contributions and personal sacrifice of children of military members in support of the armed forces.

"We defend not only our precious freedoms, but also the freedom of people everywhere to live and raise their children free from fear."

-President George W. Bush

The enemy yells for a medic. "I surrender, I surrender," he hollers. Soldiers guarding the perimeter tell him to throw his weapon into the clear and hold both hands up. Instead, he holds up one hand and keeps his M-16. The OCTs watch with interest. This is no surrender, it's a ruse, and the troops don't fall for it.

As he walks among Tennessee soldiers mopping up the last of the aggressors, Borders reflects on the mindset of his OCTs and on the troops they're training. "When these guys get done, they're going to war." The weather's been hard on the trainers and the soldiers running through the training lanes. Sgt. 1st Class Dale Boulier, was activated Jan 27th and is now an OCT with 3/337th TSB, watching over the headquarters element. "We've had it all out here... freezing rain, snow, mud, sun." He looks up at the first clear sky in days. "We can still use a little more sun."

Nearby, the unit commander takes in reports from his troops. "It's been tough," says Capt. Chuck Horvath, of Thompson Station, Tenn., "For the last

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'Gifts From the Homefront' certificates available

Army News Service

Americans can now boost the morale and well-being of deployed soldiers with "Gifts From the Homefront" CertifiChecks for post exchanges. These new PX gift certificates are the result of a partnership between the Army and Air Force Exchange Service and CertifiChecks, America's hometown gift certificate resource center. Sending CertifiChecks is a way for people to show their support of service members, according to AAFES officials. CertifiChecks are redeemable for merchandise at all AAFES PX and base exchanges throughout the world. Details are available to anyone via the AAFES Web site, www.aafes.com, and by phone at 1-877-770-GIFT (4438).

Sold by CertifiChecks, these gift certificates can be purchased 24 hours a day, seven days a week, every day of the year, and they come in denominations of \$10 and \$20. Each order includes a festive envelope. Anyone may purchase these "Gifts From the Homefront" with a U.S. credit card or check, but only authorized AAFES customers can redeem them at any PX or BX. At this time military authorities have advised that CertifiChecks can only be sent to a specific service member at his or her APO or US mailing address. AAFES officials said they are currently working to find a solution to allow CertifiChecks to be sent to units or non-specific troops. AAFES currently has 34 stores located throughout Southwest Asia in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. CertifiChecks can be redeemed at these facilities to purchase such items as health and beauty items, soft drinks, candy, snack items, pre-paid calling cards and much more.

By clicking on the link "Gifts from the Homefront" at www.aafes.com, anyone can find out how to access an order form and complete the transaction online or via a toll-free number at 1-800-770-GIFT (4438). The standard cost for the certificates is \$4.95 per order, which covers the costs for printing, mailing and handling of up to 20 certificates per order, providing they're going to the same address. Delivery of the certificates normally takes between 4-10 days, possibly longer if going overseas. Shipping and handling charges are slightly more for bulk orders of \$300.00 or more. "Gifts From the Homefront" Sending CertifiChecks will help reduce the number of parcels being sent via the Military Postal Service Agency, AAFES officials said.

"This program should very much help relieve the critical mail transportation situation," said Ed Pardini, deputy director of the Military Postal Service Agency. "Different from previous contingencies, like Desert Shield/Desert Storm, Any Service member Mail and Donation campaigns are not the helpful idea they were then. Unfortunately, Any Service member and web-sponsored donation programs are counterproductive to the safety of our troops. The sheer volume also easily causes delays to the more important mail from families and loved ones due to transportation issues."

Training (Con't)

three or four days, we've been starting early, staying late, sometimes getting only three hours of sleep a night. The training is very effective. They keep us on our toes."

But are they alert enough? Moments later, OP-FOR sweeps through the command post, firing until they get within 10 meters, then yelling, "Safety kill, safety kill!" Everyone in the CP is either killed or captured before they can mount an effective defense. Sgt. 1st Class Boulrier looks surprised. "They don't usually do that. I think they ran a little wide during the sweep."

Training's critical value runs throughout the brigade. Earlier, officers and senior enlisted listened as a lieutenant colonel pounded home the value of their job. "Here's the training standard I want from you; imagine this is your son or daughter going to war," says Lt. Col. David Collins, operations officer for 4th Brigade, 85th Division at Fort Knox. "Would you send your own child into battle with the training these soldiers have? That's our training standard. Keep to that standard."

After a day of training, Sgt. 1st Class Bradley Ward, a section leader with 3/337th TSB looks back at the work he and the rest of 4th brigade accomplished. "We're trying to get the units we train to maneuver, communicate and shoot. Our goal is for them to survive. They're not infantry, but they know their stuff. They'll be ready."



Army to tighten travel card policy

By Staff Sgt Marcia Triggs

Using the government travel card when changing duty stations will no longer be permitted, and Army officials said non-authorized use of the card will be met with harsher penalties.

Congress directed the Department of Defense to develop a comprehensive disciplinary policy for military personnel and civilians who misuse the Bank of America travel card. The policy is scheduled to be released soon, said Francis A. Rago, the U.S. Army Travel Card Program manager.

In addition to discontinuing use of the travel card during permanent change-of-station moves, a memorandum from the Office of the Secretary of the Army states that cards are to be deactivated prior to departure from duty stations, unless there is temporary duty en route.

Other changes to the travel card program, effective immediately, are: commands and activities should not use the card to pay for conference registration fees; charge cards of mobilized reservists will be transferred to active-duty agencies and deactivated until use is required; cardholders are not required to use their card for travel expenses associated with mission deployments. At the installation level, one of the first changes program coordinators made was to put the accounts of infrequent travelers in a closed or inactive status.

"We started cutting our list of cardholders two years ago by deactivating accounts, and we have a success story now," said Cynthia Jackson, from the Garrison Resource Management Service Center at Fort McPherson, Ga. "The Army's goal is for installations to keep dollars delinquent below 4.5 percent and account delinquencies below 3 percent, ours is at 1 percent," Jackson said. "Creating a smaller list of cardholders allows us to keep tabs on our users. We know who is traveling, and what they are doing while in travel status."

Fort McPherson is following the example set by DoD and the Army, by limiting their number of cardholders. The Army has cancelled more than 156,000 travel-card accounts since October, and currently has 280,000 open accounts. The number of accounts will fluctuate, and once current legislation is implemented, cards will not be issued to those who are not credit-worthy, Pentagon officials said.

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Army activates family assistance hotline

Army News Service

The U.S. Army has established a toll-free Family Assistance Hotline for Operation Iraqi Freedom at (800) 833-6622.

The hotline was established by the U.S. Army Community and Family Support Center, in conjunction with the Army Family Liaison Office staff to provide referrals and information to the families of deployed or activated soldiers.

The hotline is toll free when called from the continental United States, Hawaii, Alaska, Puerto Rico, Guam and the Virgin Islands. The hotline staff will answer calls from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. daily Eastern Standard Time to answer family support-related questions. Emergency assistance will be provided between the hours of 8 p.m. and 8 a.m. EST, officials said.

Due to operational security and force protection concerns, CFSC hotline staff cannot provide locator services (addresses) for soldiers or units, or information about operational matters. The Army National Guard and the Army Reserve state and regional support commands also operate assistance lines, though they may not always be toll free. Information is also available at www.guardfamily.org and www.army.mil/usar.

In addition to local and Army-level assistance via telephone, family members can find answers to many routine questions about family readiness, Army Community Service, and deployment support resources online at the ACS Web site, www.goacs.org, and at the Army Family Liaison Office website, www.aflo.org.



IRS defers tax for deployed troops, Army civilians

Army News Service

(A previous version of this article was incorrect in stating that Army civilian employees deployed to a combat zone are not eligible for automatic income-tax extensions. They are. But they are not exempt from paying taxes on wages earned in a combat zone.)

Soldiers will have at least 180 days after they re-deploy home to file their federal tax returns, and no penalty or interest will accrue during this period. Army civilian employees and contractors deployed to a combat zone in direct support of the military are also eligible for these tax extensions.

Soldiers also do not pay any income taxes on the wages they earn while deployed in a combat zone, nor do they pay taxes on hazardous-duty pay. Deployed civilians, though, are not eligible for this exemption. The automatic extension of time for soldiers to file their taxes is based on service in a combat zone or qualified hazardous duty area. Afghanistan has been considered a combat zone since Sept. 19, 2001. Jordan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgystan and Uzbekistan have also been designated as areas in direct support of combat for Enduring Freedom.

Kuwait was declared a combat zone in 1991, and that designation has never been lifted. Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia and Kosovo are considered hazardous duty areas and soldiers serving there receive the same deferral on their taxes as those in combat zones, according to IRS rules. Army Reserve and National Guard soldiers called to active duty - even stateside duty - might also qualify for a deferral of taxes owed, if they can show that their ability to pay taxes was impaired because of their military service. The Soldiers and Sailors Relief Act provides this benefit. The extension of time to file also applies to spouses of military members deployed to combat zones. On the other hand, if a family is owed tax refunds and wants to get money back immediately, the spouse back home can file tax returns on behalf of the deployed soldier.

For a complete list of EITC requirements, taxpayers can review Publication 596 which is available on IRS.gov or by calling 1-800-TAX-FORM (1-800-829-3676). The IRS Web site (www.irs.gov) can also answer questions about income-tax requirements.

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Travel card (Con't)

Commanders and program coordinators have always had the responsibility of maintaining accountability of their cardholders, but according to the January memorandum from Army Secretary Thomas White's office, travel-card coordinators now must review at least 10 percent of active accounts monthly. Investigating accounts is how Jackson said her organization keeps cardholders out of danger of nonpayment. "If we notice that an account is 30 days late, we contact the commander or unit point of contact before the account goes past 60 days," Jackson said. The travel card program is simple, Rago said. Cardholders use the card only for official travel expenses, a claim for reimbursement is done immediately upon return, and split disbursement is used to pay their travel card bill.

When current legislation mandating split disbursement is implemented part of the reimbursement would be sent directly to Bank of America and the balance to the traveler's bank account.

In any case, not paying the bill could affect the user's credit and security clearance, Pentagon officials said. At Congress' direction, there will be a government-wide quarterly report on the travel card program, to include a statistical summary of disciplinary action taken, officials added. Misuse will also go through security channels to determine whether there should be an impact on the cardholder's security clearance, Pentagon officials said.

Three years ago DoD mandated that federal employees use the travel card for all official travel expenses such as lodging, transportation, rental cars and other allowable charges. That changed after July 2002, when a U.S. General Accounting Office audit found numerous incidents of cardholder abuse, lack of accountability and inadequate command emphasis. "The GAO report correctly pointed out many problems with the Army's implementation of the travel-card program, and the Army is increasing scrutiny and taking corrective actions to resolve misuse and delinquency in the Army Travel Card Program," Pentagon officials said.

Since March, there were 6,869 delinquent travel card accounts, equating to \$4.1 million in delinquency. Those numbers show progress in reducing the Army's outstanding debt to Bank of America, officials said. Accounts that have past due balances made up 16.25 percent of Army accounts last year, but delinquent accounts now only total 5.24 percent.



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First U.S. Army's Master Sgt. Susan Paschal bowls one last game before her departure for the Armed Forces Bowling Competition at Lackland Air Force Base, Texas. This is the fifth time Paschal has bowled on the Army team. In this event, Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine bowlers compete for four days of doubles, mixed doubles, team and singles events to determine the top bowlers in the Armed Forces. Paschal has bowled since the early 90's and practices her game in the evenings and on weekends. Paschal works in the Office of the Inspector General, First U.S. Army



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Send us your stories or story ideas.

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